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The Selection Criteria of Advance Organizers in Junior High School English Class

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Abstract

Advance organizers are now extensively used in English teaching, but many teachers just apply them mechanically without considering the current factors of class. This paper briefly reviews usefully research concerning the selection of advance organizers in English class, and uses Humanism to explain the effects of advance organizers in English teaching, then figure out the basic needs of English class in junior high school. At last, it confirms the selection criteria of advance organizers in junior high school English class.

Key words: Advance organizer; Junior high school; English teaching

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INTRODUCTION

Without inspiring there would be no achievements, either now or in the past, and teacher usually plays the indispensable role to lead students to the right road of study. The example of Socratic method that induces a respondent to formulate latent concepts through a dialectic or logical sequence of questions is approved even now. After thousands of years, David Ausubel put forward of Meaningful Learning which is opposed to rote learning

and refers to a learning way where the new knowledge to acquire is related with previous knowledge (Ausubel, 2000). And advance organizers are one of the important toll to do the meaningful learning. "An advance organizer is information that is presented prior to learning and that can be used by the learner to organize and interpret new incoming information" (Mayer, 2003), it is a cognitive instructional strategy used to promote the learning and retention of new information. "An advance organizer is not an overview, but rather a presentation of information (either verbal or visual) that are 'umbrellas' for the new material to be learned."

The aim of this study is to summarize what are the basic standards of choosing an appropriate advance organizer for junior high school English class. It relates the qualities of advance organizers, the principles of its adoption, and the particularities of junior high school English teaching. Before focusing on research finding, this paper starts with a brief literature review of the researches of advance organizers, then the huge effects of advance organizers in English teaching from every aspect, and clarifies the characteristics of junior high school English class.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The studies of advance organizers from abroad can be divided into three periods in chronological order: First period is from 1960 to 1979. It is a Golden Age of exploring advance organizers and researches in this period prefer to prove the effectiveness of Ausubel's advance organizer theory and its teaching mode. Most of researches did prove the application of AOs (advance organizers) in Classes is positive and efficient, then it on a downward trend after 1971. However, Bruce Joyce and Marsha Well made great advances on the study against AOs in classroom teaching. Joyce holds the idea that the previous study is not influence learner's latter study directly but mediates

influence the latter study by affecting learner's cognitive structure. The second period is from 1980 to 1990 and investigators in this period used different research thinking. R. E. Mayer is the typical representative of this period. Mayer thinks that illustrative organizers can provide concerning backgrounds to help learners to understand new information and he truly hopes it can build an appropriate mechanism in learner's cognitive structure of lead into AOs to assimilate the coming studies (Feeney, 1995). However, Ausubel and Joseph found that use analogical organizers to compare the new material and old knowledge can not only remind learners of the learned knowledge, but also can help with the merging of new material with its similar conception. In that case, Analogical Organizers are more suitable for learners in the material is totally new. The third period is from 1991 until now. The rocket of multimedia and technology broaden the application areas of AOs and it also be proved AOs works well in adult education. Hatch and Clifton Almon's experiment which change the test takers into adults got the enormous effect in test the AOs' application in class teaching.

In China, studies of AOs first focused on its theory's introduce, analysis and evaluate. Yu Nanxing and Song Jun translated Ausubel's *Educational Psychology: A Cognitive View*, and this book shows the essence of advance organizer theory. *Educational Psychology: Principles of Learning and Teaching* written by Shao Ruizhen introduced Meaningful Reception Learning Theory, discriminated reception, rote and passive learning, and evaluated language reception learning. Zhang Qi's *Learning Theory* also introduced Meaningful Language Learning Theory and led to Advance Organizers Teaching Mode according to the study of Meaningful Learning. Shi Liangfang explained the concepts, conditions, types and mental mechanisms of Meaningful Reception Learning in his book *Learning Theories* and also made simply comments about it. *Educational Psychology* edited by Pi Liansheng described the learning process and conditions of meaningful learning declarative knowledge. With the expanding of AOs theory's influence in China, the studies of AOs gradual developed from theoretical to applicable aspect. Many investigators start to analyze the significant meaning of AOs and Meaningful Learning Theory applies in education reform and classroom teaching.

All in all, it had been forty years from Ausubel put forward the idea Advance Organizer and there are great achievements about it until now. The development of Ausubel's teaching strategies and theories are established theoretical and experimental foundations for latter application researches. The contents of Advance Organizer are also developed in the meanwhile, the research methods becoming more scientific and practical.

2. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASS

The English teaching in junior high school has some special characters which should be noticed while using teaching strategies. Firstly, junior high school English teaching is acceptable. Because junior high is the connect period of primary school, the teaching contents should be simple and easy to understand, especially considering the present English learning situation in China. Secondly, junior high school English teaching is interesting. As the old saying goes: "The interest is the best teacher." For Chinese lower-class pupils, English could be a totally strange subject so build their interests for English is very important and necessary. Thirdly, junior high school English teaching is the process of lay the language foundation. Junior high school is the key period of English teaching, the vocabulary, accent, grammar and sentence patterns will keep students company to the future English study. So, against with all the important characters of junior high school English class, advance organizers are play a significant role in teaching. And the following is effects of Advance Organizers in junior high school English teaching.

3. THE EFFECTS OF ADVANCE ORGANIZERS IN HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHING

An Advance Organizer helps to organize new material by outlining, arranging and sequencing the main idea of the new material based on what the learner already knows. Advance Organizers use familiar terms and concepts to link what the students already know to the new information that will be presented in the lesson, which aids in the process of transforming knowledge and creatively applying it in new situations. Advance organizers are also commonly used to help set the stage for instruction. Since David Ausubel (1960) first described advance organizers as a cognitive strategy to help students learn and retain information, teachers have developed a variety of forms for effectively organizing learning.

3.1 Form the Desire of Meaningful Learning

Meaningful learning refers to the concept that the learned knowledge is fully understood by students and students know how that specific fact relates to other stored knowledge in their brains. Advance organizers inherently are the tool of meaningful learning which put forward by Ausubel, so help students to form the desire of meaningful learning is their basic effect. They are used during expository instruction, which is the use of an expert to present information in a way that makes it easy

for students to make connections from one concept to the next.

3.2 Understand the Main Idea of New Materials Quickly

Advance organizers direct students' attention to what is important in the upcoming lesson. An advance organizer is a tool used to introduce the lesson topic and illustrate the relationship between what the students are about to learn and the information they have already learned. In that case, as long as the advance organizer is well-chosen, even difficult new material can be easily understood (Zhang, 1998).

3.3 Maintain the New Knowledge

An advance organizer highlights relationships between ideas that will be presented and the relevant information that students already have. With noticing the relationship, it will promote meaningful learning for students and maintain the new knowledge just learned. The most important effect of advance organizers is to create a mechanism of absorbing the incoming information by relate to the acquired knowledge. Once the mechanism is established, new information will be saved as long as students use association.

3.4 Develop the Cross-Culture Awareness

In China, English is taught as a foreign language, so culture difference is an unavoidable problem. However, advance organizers can be the perfect instrument to develop students' cross-culture awareness. For example, analogies and metaphors are frequently used as advance organizers, so compare Chinese and Western culture differences is a wonderful way for advance organizers.

4. THE SELECTION CRITERIA OF AOS IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASS

Because of the particularity of junior high school English class that mentioned above, the selection of advance organizers should be more careful. Advance organizers place the most general and comprehensive ideas at the beginning of a lesson and progress to more structured and detailed information. It is not only students' guide of new materials, but also teachers' helper to build a general framework of unfamiliar knowledge for students. In order to choose suitable advance organizers, teachers need to observe some principles of AOs in junior high school English class.

4.1 Match the Material

The advance organizers in junior high school English class should match the content. The most important essential criteria of advance organizers is matchability. No matter what kind of advance organizers in the teacher choose, the starting point and the foothold should be

the knowledge which going to learn. Some advance organizers which can be found in textbooks or teaching plans are fancy to the eye but absolutely unrelated to the learning material if analyze them carefully.

4.2 Simplification

The advance organizers in junior high school English class should be as simple as possible (Chen, 2006). Advance organizers don't have to be lengthy or complex, just clearly understood and related to the material. Individuals who are organizationally impaired may be further confused by organizers that are too complex. The advance organizer in high school should be as simple as possible, with only as much visual detail as is necessary to communicate the organization of the concept or task. However, it also can not be a simple overview which remains uncertainties in students' mind.

4.3 Concreteness

The advance organizers in junior high school English class should be as concrete as necessary. As indicated above, junior high school students are just contact with English systematically. Their young minds are too concrete to process abstract symbols and they do not understand grammar yet. In addition, teachers should not assume that just because a student can read, it is possible to provide advance organizers which are full of abstract definitions. Thus, junior high school students still benefit from concrete organizers like pictures even if they can read adequately.

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the characteristics of junior high school English class, it is easy to find out that advance organizers are wonderful scaffold for students to build the frame of new knowledge and deeply understand it. And this paper provides some criteria of advance organizers, which did a little contribution to teachers' English teaching.

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